

How High Will You Go?



Many people give, and continue to give, out of habit. If they give \$50 or \$500 or even \$5,000 to an organization, they're likely to continue at that level until something makes them rethink their giving or reconsider the size of their gifts. In this exercise, without specifically sharing amounts with others, participants will explore how they make charitable choices. The conversation often yields some surprising and useful information.

Why Do This Exercise?

To help people learn what motivates them as donors and apply that learning to others

Use This Exercise When

You want to challenge your board to consider making larger gifts before asking others to give

Time Required

30 minutes

Audience

Anyone involved with your fundraising campaign: some combination of board, staff, and volunteers—though this exercise is especially useful for boards

Setting

A private room, large enough to seat participants in a circle—either around a table or freestanding

Materials

- Flip chart paper and markers
- Paper and pens

FACILITATING THE EXERCISE

1. From the start, it's important to emphasize that you will NOT be asking attendees to reveal the dollar amounts of their giving. You must respect people's privacy as donors, while at the same time encouraging them to share the process they use to determine the size of their gifts.
2. Begin by telling participants that your goal is to help everyone think about how donors make giving decisions. The more they understand the factors that influence gift amounts, the more effective they'll be as solicitors.
3. Ask participants to think of two different gift amounts that represent the high and low of what they might consider giving to your organization this year. If you're about to launch your annual campaign, focus on that. If you're in the middle of a capital campaign, emphasize that.

4. Ask each person to write down three things that would encourage him or her to give at the high end of the range. Then ask everyone to share one or two items, capturing their ideas on the flip chart. They might offer the following ideas:
 - If I knew my increased gift would really make a difference
 - If I was asked in person
 - If my gift was matched by someone else's gift
 - If I was clearer about what was expected of me as a board member
 - If I felt more connected to the mission
5. When you have completed the list, ask the group for help selecting the three most common reasons. Star or underline these items.
6. To debrief the exercise, ask some combination of the following questions:
 - Among the many reasons donors might increase their gifts, which reasons did you find most intriguing? Why?
 - When asking for donations, how might we apply these ideas? (For example, you might solicit every board member in person, or seek challenge gifts to be matched by board donations.)
 - What are some ways we might incorporate these suggestions into our fundraising and outreach materials?

Please note: while this activity does not emphasize the amount of people's gifts, everyone will be actively thinking about whether they might make a larger contribution.

TRAINING TIP When writing suggestions on the flip chart, be sure to include all of them. If someone duplicates an earlier suggestion, put a check mark by the item you've already written to acknowledge its importance. If you pick and choose ideas, those whose suggestions you don't write down will feel disrespected and hesitate to offer more ideas.